CAPTAIN GEORGE'S

Penny Dreadful

TORONTO, JULY 22, 1977 NUMBER 439

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A WEEKLY REVIEW

GUEST COLUMN

BY JOHN WRIGHT

Reading Pete Harris in PD 432 I was reminded yet again that perhaps things aren't that much different in various parts of the free world. It's with some reluctance that I write this, for I don't especially enjoy people who pounce upon an opportunity to top a good story. And I'm not sure that this does. But ...for what it's worth...

During the years of WWII comic books stopped entering South Africa. Then suddenly, towards the close of the war, there they were--back on the stands. Only to our dismay we discovered that they contained fewer pages, art styles had changed, old favourites were missing from certain well-remembered titles --and most irritating at the time, was the discovery of Archie hogging the covers of Pep Comics. Worse, these books were selling for 1/6 (roughly 30 cents each), or three times as much as we had previously paid. But we shelled out, even though money was almighty tight.

Came a Saturday morning around 1945, and on the way to a double-feature, I stopped in at The American Mail Company--just another retailer of books and magazines--to see how many new comics I couldn't afford. Well, how do you describe a kid's reaction at finding a virtual mountain of old comics piled upon the floor, with none priced above fourpence (about 6 cents) each? Titles ranged from All-Star to Popular to Big Shot to America's Greatest, and all were in almost mint condition. It transpired that these books were being bought by the pound in the U. S. and shipped across as ballast. I don't know how many shipments were made in this fashion, but it went on for quite some time.

To solve the financial problem, along with other kids, I sold empty bottles, old newspapers, ran errands--anything to make a buck. You see, there were few duplicates in those piles. Now at that time our friends in the Chinese community lived under very strict parental law. This meant that although most always had money, they had no time at all to spend it. With the exception of Saturday afternoons, all free time was spent behind the counters of their parents' shops. One such friend suggested a lending library, and in no time at all we were renting comics out at 10 cents a night. All the money made was used to buy extra stock.

At this time, Saturday mornings would see hordes of kids outside the movie houses, waiting for the box office to open. Somebody decided it would be a good idea to exchange comics during these long waits, and soon we were part of the scene. Comics were traded at the rate of two for one and often five for one. (I once traded Jackpot No. 1 for 54 other titles, s'help me.) We also bought comics we knew our "customers" wanted to read, and it was not uncommon to pay 10/- or a pound (then about $2 to $4) for a good copy of say,

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P~D GUIDE

BOOK PATROL: Fantastic Television (Harmony Books) by Gary Gerani, with Paul H. Schulman, is worth getting if you're a fan of such TV series as Twilight Zone, Star Trek, The Prisoner, Night Stalker and so on. And, if you're a fan of any book that provides detailed credits. Fantastic Television ($5.95; $7.25 in Canada) offers a chronological listing of every episode of the aforementioned shows, plus such series as Superman, One Step Beyond, Thriller, The Outer Limits, Batman, The Invaders, Night Gallery and Space 1999. Each listing includes the episode title, writer, director and cast, plus a brief plot capsule. It's profusely illustrated with stills and, as well, there are sections on other fantasy shows, British and American; made-for-TV movies and kid-oriented series... THE BROADCAST SCENE: CFRB is running episodes from the old Gunsmoke radio series starring William Conrad as Matt Dillon Fridays at 11:30 pm. Also worth catching is CBC Radio's series of old radio shows heard nightly at 7:30--The Whistler, Big Town, Jack Benny etc... CBS will telecast four programs from The Jack Benny Show from the early 1960s beginning Tuesday, Aug. 2, at 8 p.m. The first show features a visit to Jack's legendary vault... FILLUM NOTES: Gloria Swanson and Howard Hawks are slated to attend The World Film Festival Aug. 19-28 in Montreal where retrospectives of their films will be held, as well as tributes to Federico Fellini and Laurence Olivier... TEEVEE NOTES: Unfortunately, most viewers in Toronto can't get the station, but it's worth mentioning that, as part of an early morning (6:30 a.m.) movie package, Rochester's ch. 10 is showing the two Lone Ranger theatrical features released in the 50s on Aug. 4 and 5... The Making Of Star Wars, a one-hour behind-the-scenes ABC-TV special is slated for Friday, Sept. 16, at 8 pm. ... DUKE'S MIXTURE: John Wayne has signed with ABC-TV to appear in six major two-hour specials during the 1977-78 season. The ABC announcement says "the agreement calls for Mr. Wayne to appear as himself," which shoots down a theory here that the next logical step for Wayne was made-for-TV westerns inasmuch as most of his loyal followers no longer go out to movies.

JOHN WRIGHT continued

Master. Hell, we were big shots back then, and I guess a lot of kids doubted our sanity. Some of those same kids brought those big shots down to size by selling copies of Crackajack or All-Star for a dollar or two, forgetting to mention that we were actually only buying good covers. Too often the contents turned out to be the pages of Three Ring or Coo Coo!

You're so right, Pete... Had we but known!

PETE HARRIS

We often bandy about the term "time trip" these days, but last week, I came as close, I think, as it is humanly possible to taking just such an excursion into the past...

When I was a kid and moviegoing was much more of a family affair than it is now, the theatres we went to regularly were the Bedford, Hudson, Eglinton, Circle, Avenue and Capitol, all of which were more or less located in that geographical area known as North Toronto. And, among the many, many movies that I saw in the bosom of my family, as it were, was Swing Time, a 1936 Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers musical.

There was one number in particular, A Fine Romance, which became implanted in my memory probably because the snow-covered set on which it takes place was a kid's delight. I remembered a car driving up in front of an abandoned inn, a snowball-tossing sequence and the song itself, certainly one of the most sarcastic love songs ever written, which also had more appeal for a kid than a straightforward mushy love song.

Let us now leap forward several decades. Last week, as part of a new policy at the Capitol--yes, the same Capitol of my childhood--a brand new 35mm print of Swing Time was unveiled. There, projected in the proper screen ratio were the shimmering silky whites and marble-like blacks that were RKO hallmarks. There, before my eyes, unreeled the usual Astaire-Rogers romantic mixup and the usual Astaire-Rogers numbers to such songs as Pick Yourself Up, Waltz in Swing Time, The Way You Look Tonight, Never Gonna Dance and... A Fine Romance.

There, before my eyes, an open touring car with Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Helen Broderick and Victor Moore drives up to the abandoned New Amsterdam Inn. There was the stroll through the snow-covered landscape. There was Ginger, romantically snuggling up to Fred; there was Fred rebuffing her in spite of himself for plot reasons too complex to detail here. There was Ginger singing A Fine Romance. There was Fred, finally giving in to his true feelings. There was Victor Moore throwing a snowball at Fred to remind him of his duty; there was Fred retaliating and hitting Helen Broderick instead. There was Victor, hastily explaining Fred's aloofness to Ginger. There was Fred throwing caution to the winds, only to find that Ginger was the aloof one. And there was Fred offering his own rendition of A Fine Romance.

And there was I, in a theatre of my childhood watching a fondly remembered movie of my childhood, and, if ever there was a moment in my life when past and present blended into one indivisible dimension, that was it, my friends, that was it.